

Mail and Guardian

Day Zero is a myth, say protesters looking to fill up at Zille's residence

Jenni Evans 12 Feb 2018 22:09

About 20 members of a coalition against the privatisation of water descended on Western Cape Premier Helen Zille's official residence Leeuwenhof in Cape Town on Monday to fill their water containers from a tap outside her gate.

They claimed that #DayZero was "fake news".

"The City is deliberately creating a scarcity, scaring the people about the Day Zero," said Shaheed Mohammed, a committee member of the Tafelsig Activists Forum (TAF), outside Zille's gate, while police looked on. "Day Zero is a myth, Day Zero is fake, it's news being promoted by the City and by the province," said Mohamed. He said there was water available, but that the City was "creating" the scarcity which had led to calls for a drastic reduction in water consumption.

This had led to the construction of temporary desalination plants and the drilling of the Mitchells Plain aquifer at great cost and potential environmental damage, he said. The group says there are 70 springs around Cape Town which should be freely accessible to the public, and that gates should be opened if they are on locked sites. It also wants old underground tunnels reopened and rehabilitated so that the water there can be used, instead of running into the sea. Mohamed said the desalination and aquifer plans were expensive and "chaotic".

'Bring your containers

The activists released a statement earlier inviting people to go to Zille's official residence to fetch water, saying she had invited them. "The Premier has indicated that people are welcome to come to her residence to fetch spring water," the coalition stated. "On Monday 12 February from 12:30 pm to 2pm, we call on everyone to come with us to Leeuwenhof in Oranjezicht to fetch spring water.

"After all, our taxes paid R92 000 to purify the spring at the Premier's residence."

"...Bring your containers on Monday, open all 70 springs."

Waving an empty water container in the air, TAF chairperson Sulyman Stellenboom switched on the tap next to a small waterfall at the entrance to Zille's residence.

About half a cup of water came out before the flow stopped.

A policeman explained to the group that the tap had been switched off because the water purification system was not working.

Next to the small waterfall was a sign warning that the water was not drinkable.

“She [Zille] referred us to the Department of Public Works. The filters is dirty [sic],” said Stellenboom. ‘Look how green it is in there’

Mohamed said Zille had extended an open invitation to anybody to come and fetch spring water from her official residence, after complaints that the water feeding the lush grounds could be put to better use.

The group – which comprised unionists, residents and activists in a “Water Coalition” –was upset that, not only was the tap switched off, but that the gates were also closed so they could not get inside to the other taps on the property.

“Look how green it is in there, not brown like where we live,” said one woman. “My fruit trees are dying!”.

The group said they would write to Zille for clarity on why they were not able to get water as per her invitation, and when they could come back.

In September, Zille reportedly said in the Western Cape legislature that people were welcome to share the water produced by a R92 754 purifier installed at the residence if it was purified and feasible.

In a tweet in response to the gathering on Monday, Zille said: “Believe me, Day Zero is not a myth. We are going to have to work very hard not to reach level 7 water restrictions – which is when water is rationed and we have to queue for it. That transition has been called Day Zero. Ppl are now taking it seriously.”

Believe me, Day Zero is not a myth. We are going to have to work very hard not to reach level 7 water restrictions — which is when water is rationed and we have to queue for it. That transition has been called Day Zero. Ppl are now taking it seriously.

Zille’s spokesperson Michael Mpofu said the tap near the security gate at the Leeuwenhof Estate supplied non-potable water and that the pressure was low because of the drought.

“The stream off the mountain, which feeds this water source, often is low, or even dry, in summer.” He said during the course of last year, Zille had requested that the City of Cape Town feed the water from the stream into the Molteno Reservoir, where it would be purified for domestic use.

“This work is in progress,” Mpofu said. He said members of the public were welcome to fill bottles from that tap, if there was sufficient pressure to do so. However, he requested that this be done in

an “orderly and appropriate” way. “To be clear, the water available near the gate... is polluted water that cannot be used for drinking purposes. “The purifier used to clean it is currently clogged with silt as a result of the reduction in water flow and an increased ratio of silt to water in the stream,” Mpofu said. Members of the SAPS would monitor activity at the Premier’s tap and uphold the law, if necessary, Mpofu added.

#DayZero is a campaign formalised by a Public Relations firm Resolve Communications to reduce water consumption as average dam levels drop and the city’s water supply becomes precarious. If #DayZero is called - currently set at May 11 - an emergency water supply programme will kick in, with people rationed to 25 litres each to be fetched at points of distribution. – News24